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ABSTRACT

According to the literature and historical experience, differences of opinion exist among teachers about the role and functions of counseling professionals in schools, and little information is available about preservice instruction on the work of school counselors. A study was conducted, therefore, for the following purposes: (1) to determine how much a sample of preservice teachers knew about the role and function of school counselors and to measure their attitudes toward using school counseling resources; (2) to examine the sources, amount, and perceived adequacy of instruction received by preservice teachers relative to counselor role and function and use of counselor resources; and (3) to ascertain whether these preservice teachers' knowledge and attitudes about counseling resources would change over the course of student teaching. Secondary teacher education students (N=28) responded to a survey immediately prior to and immediately following 12 weeks of student teaching. Data were also collected from an additional group of students (N=29), none of whom had completed the initial survey. Results indicate that minimal information about counseling resources was available to the study participants; that both groups' primary source of information at the conclusion of the study was student teaching itself; and that participants perceived themselves as having a good understanding of counselor role and function, an assessment that appears to be naive when their responses are compared to those of professionals in the field. Changes in preservice teachers' knowledge and attitudes about the use of counseling resources were not considered sufficient to indicate that student teaching is an adequate source of information on this topic. (LL)

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Preservice Teacher Training: A Piece Is Missing!

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PRESERVICE TEACHER TRAINING: A PIECE IS MISSING!

School counseling is a relatively young profession that has evolved within one of the oldest professions that we know today. One who is at all familiar with the history of its evolution (Baker, 1992) is not likely to be greatly surprised that questions still abound as to the value and contributions of counseling professionals in schools.

The roots of school counseling are found in the social reform movement that affected schools of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Guidance began to appear as a subject in the curriculum, but was not clearly defined with formally-established goals, assumptions, and functions. Rather, its content varied in response to local needs, with some schools giving attention to moral development and others giving attention to preparing students for employability.

Concurrently with the establishment of guidance classes in schools, related forces outside of education were beginning to emerge. Among these were the vocational guidance movement that focused on out-of-school youths, the psychometric movement which led to standardized tests that could be used in school placement and other decision-making, and the mental health movement that focused attention on childhood as a critical period in personal development. These movements were differentially influential in reshaping the features of guidance curricula that already were quite variable.

The variability in those early days was compounded by a lack of widely accepted standards for training or practice; school guidance workers without commonly accepted roles tended to respond to the day-to-day wishes of their local administrators. Although training programs for school counselors had become somewhat standardized by the 1950s, the same could not be said for guidance and counseling practices in schools. The National Defense Education Act of 1958, designed in part to improve the quality of such practices, often served to intensify the problem. New programs were begun in schools and staffed with teachers who had little or no specialized training for guidance and counseling functions. Without such training, local circumstances again predominated and, three decades later, the effects on school counseling linger.

One major effect has been lack of agreement among educators about the role and functions of school counselors. Significant differences of opinion about counselor role and functions are found between teachers and counselors (Alaniz, 1990; Valine, Higgins, & Hatcher, 1982). These differences may lead to animosity and under-utilization of counselors as resources that teachers can use in meeting students' educational needs. In fact, many of those who serve as school counselors are often heard to say that they have little opportunity to do the things for which they have been trained. Resolving the differences of opinion about the place of counselors in schools is imperative if

the schools of the twenty-first century are to meet the needs of all students with efficacy and efficiency.

Some have suggested that the differences of opinion exist because teachers lack information about expected counselor roles. Alaniz (1990), for example, reported that teachers in eight large urban and suburban high schools, by self-report, did not know how counselors used their time and had only infrequent discussions with counselors about students' needs. She also reported that counselors in these schools believed their activities were not appreciated by the teachers. When such disparities exist, counselors may be viewed as ineffective (Ginter, Scalise, & Presse, 1990). As stated by Valine et al. (1982), "If the teacher does not know what the role of the counselor should be (emphasis added), it (is) most difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of that role" (p. 210).

One obvious solution to the problem of teachers' lack of information about counselor roles is increased training on the topic. Counselor educators often emphasize to their trainees that they should be prepared to provide such information through inservice activities with teachers. This approach, however, has inherent difficulties in that teachers may work in the classroom for several years before they are adequately informed, if ever, about the ways that counselors can assist with meeting students' educational needs.

An alternative with less inherent difficulties is training preservice teachers to effectively use counseling resources that

are available to them. This alternative, however, has received little attention. We found only one reference to training preservice school personnel about counselor role and functions. That reference was a suggestion that preservice training of teachers and administrators should include description of the work of school counselors. No assessment, however, of the extent to which such training exists has been reported. Quick reviews of textbooks (e.g., Johnson, Collins, Dupuis, & Johansen, 1991; Ornstein & Levine, 1989) commonly used in professional education courses, furthermore, yield little hope that such training does exist to any significant degree.

The primary purpose of the present study, therefore, was to determine how much a convenient sample of preservice teachers know about counselor role and functions and to measure their attitudes toward using school counseling resources. Based on the dearth of related literature, we anticipated that preservice teachers' knowledge of counselor role and functions and their attitudes toward using counseling resources to meet student's needs would be uninformed. A secondary purpose of this study was to determine the sources, amount, and perceived adequacy of the instruction received by preservice teachers relative to counselor role and functions and use of counseling resources in educational processes. A tertiary purpose was to determine whether these preservice teachers' knowledge and attitudes about counseling resources would change over the course of student teaching.

Method

Secondary teacher education students at an Arkansas university were surveyed immediately prior to and immediately following 12 weeks of student teaching. Questions were asked to determine demographics of the group and sources of information about school counseling as well as to measure their understanding of counselor role and functions.

Subjects. All students who were enrolled in three sections of a five-week professional education course, Instructional Design, that immediately precedes secondary student teaching (in the same semester) were asked to complete the survey during their last class meeting. These students and students from two other sections of Instructional Design were also asked to complete the survey during a general meeting of all secondary education majors when they returned from student teaching. Thus, all participants were seniors who were close to fulfilling the requirements for graduation and for teacher certification.

Data were collected from 33 students prior to student teaching. Of these 33 students, 28 students (24 females, 4 males) also completed the survey following student teaching. Most of these students were 20 to 30 years old (N = 22); the remainder were 31 to 40 years old (N = 6). Most (N = 26) reported that the secondary school they had attended had a counselor. A broad variety of academic majors were included within this group; these participants are referred to as Group 1.

Data were collected from an additional 29 students (17 females, 12 males) following student teaching; none of these students had completed the initial survey. Most were 20 to 30 years old (N = 23); 3 were 31 to 40 years old; 2 were 41 to 50 years old; and 1 was in the range from 51 to 60 years. All reported that the secondary school they had attended had a counselor. Almost all of the possible academic majors were represented within this group; these participants are referred to as Group 2.

Instrument. Data were collected on both occasions using a questionnaire developed by the authors. Of the 62 items included in the questionnaire, 11 were designed to elicit the demographic information reported above. Five items were designed to elicit information about the sources of preservice teachers' knowledge of counselor role and functions, and the remaining 46 items were designed to measure their knowledge and attitudes about the role and functions.

Many of the last 46 items were drawn from those that have been used in previous research (Morse & Russell, 1988; Valine et al., 1982) measuring the knowledge and attitudes of inservice teachers, counselors, and administrators. Other items were drawn from professional literature describing the expected role and functions of school counselors. Participants responded to these items using a four-point Likert scale coded from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Preferred responses to these items were determined by the authors based on their professional knowledge.

During data analysis, five items were identified as being too ambiguous; these items were eliminated from consideration in data analysis, leaving 41 items to measure knowledge and attitudes about counselor role and functions.

Procedures. Participants were told that the purpose of the study was to measure preservice teachers' thinking about the role and functions of school counselors. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent statements were obtained from all those who agreed to participate. They recorded their responses on computer scorable answer sheets and were given an opportunity to write comments reflecting any additional thoughts they might have about school counselors' role and functions.

Data Analysis. Data were analyzed in accordance with the three purposes of the study. Initially, responses to the 41 items measuring knowledge and attitudes about counselor role and functions were analyzed by comparing them to the preferred responses established by the authors. The percentage of questions answered in the preferred direction was calculated for the 28 students in Group 1 who completed the pre-test and the 57 students in both Groups 1 and 2 who completed the post-test.

Responses to the questions pertaining to instruction about counselor role and functions were analyzed by calculating the percentages of students choosing each possible answer. Response percentages were determined relative to both pre- and post-test measures for Group 1 participants, and relative to the post-test only for Group 2 participants.

Tests of significant difference were used to determine whether preservice teachers' knowledge and attitudes about counseling resources changed over the course of student teaching. Dependent-*t* tests were calculated for each of the 41 relevant questions. Prior to calculations, the level of confidence for significant differences was set at .05. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) calculations ($p < .05$) were used for post hoc comparisons between post-test results for Group 1 participants and those of Group 2 participants.

Results

The primary purpose of this study was to determine how much preservice teachers know about counselor role and functions and to measure their attitudes toward using counseling resources. Analysis of the 41 questions pertaining to this purpose revealed that the 28 students in Group 1 answered 21 questions (51%) on the pre-test in the preferred direction. At completion of student teaching, the 57 students in Groups 1 and 2 combined answered 22 questions (54%) in the preferred direction.

The secondary purpose of this study was to measure the instruction received by preservice teachers relative to counselor role and functions and use of counseling resources in educational processes. The sources, amount, and perceived adequacy of the instruction were assessed.

Sources of instruction. Participants were asked to indicate their primary source of information about school counselor role and functions. Group 1 endorsed four sources of information on

the pre-test. These sources were a textbook (4 students, 15.4%), a guest speaker (3, 11.5%), a class lecture (11, 42.3%), and a class assignment (8, 30.8%). This group endorsed five sources of information on the post-test. These sources were a textbook (1 student, 3.6%), a guest speaker (2, 7.1%), a class lecture (8, 28.6%), a class assignment (3, 10.7%), and student teaching (14, 50.0%). Group 2 also endorsed five sources of information on the post-test. These sources were a textbook (1 student, 3.6%), a guest speaker (1, 3.6%), a class lecture (7, 25.0%), a class assignment (4, 14.3%), and student teaching (15, 53.6%).

Amount of instruction. Participants were asked to report the amount of instruction they received about school counselor role and functions. Group 1 reported amounts of instruction ranging from none to more than three hours. On the pre-test, 1 hour or less was reported by 17 students (62.9%), 2 to 3 hours was reported by 9 students (33.3%), and more than 3 hours was reported by 1 student (3.7%). On the post-test, 1 hour or less was reported by 5 students (18.5%), 2 to 3 hours was reported by 17 students (62.9%), and more than 3 hours was reported by 5 students (18.5%). Group 2 reported amounts of instruction ranging from none to three hours or less. One hour or less was reported by 20 students (74.1%), and 2 to 3 hours was reported by 7 students (25.9%). No students in Group 2 reported more than 3 hours.

Perceived adequacy of instruction. Participants were asked to evaluate the adequacy of instruction they received about

school counselor role and functions. Prior to student teaching, 4 students (14.3%) in Group 1 reported that instruction had been adequate, 18 (64.3%) reported that instruction had been inadequate, and 6 (21.4%) reported uncertainty about the adequacy of the instruction. Following student teaching, 7 students (25.0%) in this group reported adequate instruction, 16 (57.1%) reported inadequate instruction, and 5 (17.9%) were uncertain. Also following student teaching, 10 students (35.7%) in Group 2 reported adequate instruction, 9 (32.1%) reported inadequate instruction, and 9 (32.1%) were uncertain.

Participants were also asked to evaluate their understanding of the role of school counselors. Prior to student teaching, Group 1 participants acknowledged lack of understanding with only 9 students (32.1%) responding in a positive direction. In contrast, 9 students (32.1%) responded in a negative direction and 10 students (35.7%) responded to this item with uncertainty. Following student teaching, Group 1 reported increased understanding with 18 students (64.3%) responding in a positive direction, 5 (17.9%) responding in a negative direction, and 5 (17.9%) responding with uncertainty. Likewise, Group 2 participants generally reported understanding of the role with 19 students (65.5%) responding in a positive direction, 6 (20.7%) responding in a negative direction, and 4 (13.8%) responding with uncertainty.

Relative to the tertiary purpose of this study, mean responses of Group 1 were examined for significant change

associated with the student teaching experience. Significant differences were noted in five items, with positive change on two items and negative change on three items. Following student teaching, Group 1 participants agreed that counselors work with students in groups to develop problem-solving skills, whereas they had disagreed with this statement before student teaching. Participants' disagreement that individual counseling is an expensive use of counselors' time increased during student teaching. Prior to student teaching, participants disagreed somewhat that counselors consult with teachers on classroom management techniques, provide in-service training on child development, and conduct human relations training with school personnel. Disagreement with these items was stronger following student teaching than it had been before.

Discussion

Consistent with anticipated outcomes, the results of this study indicate that the preservice teachers who participated are uninformed about counselor role and functions and appropriate use of counseling resources by teachers. On both pre- and post-test measures, participants answered only one-half of the items in the preferred direction as defined by professionals in the field. Some unexplained variability in responding was noted. For example, examination of the responses revealed that some items answered in the preferred direction on the pre-test were no longer answered in that direction on the post-test, whereas the reverse was true of some other items.

Various sources of information about counseling resources were available to participants in this study, but only at a minimum level. Only a few students from either group reported more than 3 hours of instruction about possible uses of school counseling resources. Furthermore, the majority of participants from both groups considered the amount of instruction to be less than adequate.

Some differences were noted between measures obtained prior to and following student teaching. Group 1 participants' primary source of information prior to student teaching was class lecture, but both groups' primary source of information at the conclusion of the study was reportedly student teaching itself. Interestingly, participants perceived themselves as having a good understanding of counselor role and functions following student teaching despite the reported inadequacy of instruction. This self assessment appears to be quite naive in view of the lack of accurate understanding observed by comparing their responses to those of professionals in the field.

Changes in preservice teachers' knowledge and attitudes about the use of counseling resources were not sufficient to indicate that student teaching is an adequate source of information about this important topic. In fact, most of the noted changes indicated even less accurate understanding following student teaching.

Various explanations for unexpected changes during student teaching are possible. These include observation of actual

counseling practice in the schools and influence by cooperating teachers with whom the students were associated. In either case, additional instruction is warranted as a means to increase the agreement among educators about the role and functions of school counselors. Both teachers and counselors want to provide maximum educational opportunities for all students; this goal, however, is not likely to be achieved when teachers and counselors work independently rather than cooperating with one another. Yet, independence should be expected when teachers lack understanding of the ways counselors can assist them in meeting their goals. Preservice teacher training is the logical, and perhaps only, source of such information!

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